

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The Office Action consisted of objections to the claims due to informalities, and rejections of the claims under 35 USC §§102 and 103. Each will be responded to below

a. Response to Claim Objections

Claims 1, 11, 12, 13 and 19 were objected to because of the informalities identified in the Office Action.

By the present amendment Applicant has corrected each of the informalities as specified in the Office Action. Applicant therefore believes that the objections to the claims have been overcome.

b. Response to Claim Objections under 35 USC §102

Claim 1 was rejected under 35 USC §102(b) as being anticipated *Trüb* (U.S. 1,825,029). For the reasons set forth below Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection.

In order to anticipate a claim under 35 USC §102, the reference must teach every element of the claim (MPEP 2131). Claim 1 contains the following limitation that is not taught by *Trüb*: “a handle portion...for being gripped and rotated by the fingers of a hand and having an opening for attachment of a load thereto.”

In the Office Action, it was asserted that *Trüb* shows a handle portion having “an opening 2a capable of attachment of a load (screwdriver) thereto.” Applicant respectfully disagrees, and submits that a screwdriver slot does not constitute an opening for attachment of a load. To begin with, a screwdriver is merely a tool for installing the device, not a load that it carries in use. Moreover, the slot does not attach the screwdriver to the connector; “attach” means to fasten or affix (e.g., see the attached dictionary definition), whereas in *Trüb* the screwdriver is held to the connector not by the slot but by the person using it, and would simply fall away if the person were to let go.

Trüb therefore fails to teach a connector assembly as claimed, with a handle portion having an opening for attachment of a load thereto. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that *Trüb* fails to anticipate claim 1, and requests that the rejection of the claim under 35 USC §102 be reconsidered and withdrawn.

c. Response to Claim Rejections under 35 USC §103

Claims 2-22 were rejected under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Trüb* in view of *McNatt* (U.S. 1,347,642). For the reasons set forth below, Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection.

To establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness under 35 USC §103, the references when combined must teach or suggest all of the claim limitations (MPEP 2143). As was explained above, Applicant's claim 1 includes a limitation expressly requiring that the handle portion has an opening for attachment of a load thereto; claims 2-13 depend from claim 1 and therefore include this limitation as well. Independent claim 14, from which claims 15-22 depend, contains a corresponding limitation.

As was discussed above, *Trüb* does not show the foregoing element. *McNatt*, in turn, was cited only as showing protuberances for engaging the material of a tarp, and adds nothing that would teach or suggest this limitation; the device shown in *McNatt* is simply a small clasp or "snap" for joining two layers of material, and does not show any feature whatsoever for attachment of an external load.

Accordingly, taken either alone or in combination, *Trüb* and *McNatt* fail to teach or suggest all of the limitations of Applicant's independent claims 1 and 14, from which claims 2-13 and 15-22 depend. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that the references fail to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness, and requests that the rejection under 35 USC §103 be reconsidered and withdrawn.

The dependent claims contain additional limitations that are neither taught nor suggested by the references. Claim 2 requires that the bearing faces include a plurality of raised protuberances for efficiently engaging the material so as to prevent accidental loosening of the connector members, claim 3 requires that the raised protuberances have rounded corners so as to

avoid damaging the material, and claim 4 recites that the protuberances are elongate and oval and arranged radially about the screw and socket portions. None of these elements are shown by the references: In the Office Action, it is asserted that a plurality of raised protuberances is taught by *McNatt*, however, the features referred to appear to be rivets that fixedly mount the parts of the clasp (3, 4) to the two layers of fabric, not raised protuberances for frictionally engaging the fabric; as for the exposed ends of the rivets, these do not engage the fabric but only the fibrous filling (5) between the two layers of fabric (see FIGS. 4-5). Furthermore, Applicant traverses the assertion made in the Office Action that the radial arrangement of elongate, oval protuberances is a mere "change of shape"; not only does this arrangement provide significant functional advantages (by presenting an increased length transverse to the direction of rotation, so as to increase resistance to loosening), but the references provide no motivation for providing protuberances having such configuration (apart from failing to show protuberances to begin with, the clasps in *McNatt* do not screw together and therefore there is no need to provide resistance to rotation in the opposite direction).

Regarding claims 8-9, these recite a radiussed rim about the bearing face that prevents damage to the material of the tarp; the Office Action asserted that this is disclosed by *Trüb*, however *Trüb* plainly shows a non-radiused rim about the bearing face (see FIG. 6). Claims 10-13 recite that the handle comprises a flange portion that extends normal to the base portion, and that the opening for attachment of a load comprises a bore or hook on the flange portion; the Office Action asserted that these elements are shown by *Trüb*, however, not only does *Trüb* show a circular knob instead of a flange portion, the knob extends generally parallel to the base portion rather than normal to it as required by the claims (see FIG. 6).

Independent claim 14 and its dependent claims contain limitations corresponding to those discussed above. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 2-23 contain additional limitations that further distinguish over the references.

d. New Claims

New claims 23-25 have been added to secure to the Applicant the full measure of protection to which he is entitled.

New claim 23 contains limitations reciting that the male and female connectors each include a flange portion that extends generally normal to the bearing face, for being gripped and rotated between the fingers. For the reasons explained above, the cited references do not teach or suggest such an element.

Claims 24 and 25 depend from claim 23 and include the limitations thereof. Claim 24 recites that the attachment opening is a bore that extends through the flange portion on an axis perpendicular to the axis of the screw and socket portions, while claim 25 recites that the attachment opening is a hook portion formed on the flange portion and having an opening that extends on an axis generally perpendicular to that of the screw/socket portions. Support for these limitations is found in the specification at page 10, line 32 – page 11, line 1.

Accordingly, it is believed that new claims 23-25 are patentably distinct over the references.

e. Conclusion

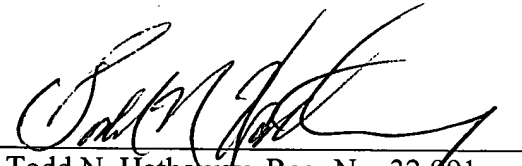
Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the present application in view of the amendments and remarks set forth herein. It is believed that the claims are now in condition for allowance. If there is any matter that can be expedited by consultation with Applicant's attorney, such would be welcome. Applicant's attorney can normally be reached at the telephone number given below.

Signed at Bellingham, County of Whatcom, State of Washington this 15th day of
September 2005.

Respectfully submitted,

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